

To: Honorable President and  
Members of the Planning Board

From: Henry Dong, Planner II

Date: July 9, 2018

Re: **PLN18-0079 – Design Review and Zoning Text Amendment for an Affordable Housing Development at 727 Buena Vista Avenue – Applicant: Housing Authority of the City of Alameda.** A request for Design Review approval and Zoning Text Amendment to replace 40 existing affordable housing units with an approximately 104,000-square-foot four-story building containing 78 new affordable housing units. The site is located within the R-3-PD (Garden Residential – Planned Development) and the R-5 (General Residential) zoning districts. The zoning text amendment allows for a better open space plan without reducing the required amount of open space on the site. The proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resource Code 21159.23 exemption for affordable housing, and under CEQA Guidelines Section 15332, Infill Development Projects. The proposed zoning text amendment is exempt under Section 15305, Minor Alterations to Land Use Limitations.

## BACKGROUND

On September 11, 2017, the Planning Board approved a development plan to demolish eight buildings containing 40 modular housing units, and to construct a new affordable housing project with a maximum of 80 units. The Development Plan also approved retaining six existing buildings containing 13 residential units, as well the total parking to be provided, site access, and landscaping on the 2.45-acre site. The development plan was approved in advance of Design Review in order for the Housing Authority to meet application deadlines for financing. The Housing Authority is now requesting Design Review approval consistent with the approved development plan to construct a new 104,000-square-foot four-story affordable housing project containing 78 units (Exhibit 1). The proposed building includes seven studios, 31 one-bedroom units, 18 two-bedroom units, and 22 three-bedroom units. All of the units will be deed restricted for low- and very low-income households. The project plans and a statement of purpose for the project are attached (Exhibits 2 and 3).

The site is located one block from Webster Street at 727 Buena Vista Avenue and contains a 1.96-acre Parcel No. 1 and a 0.47-acre Parcel No. 2. Parcel No. 1 is located within the R-5 zoning district and Parcel No. 2 is located within the R-3-PD zoning district.

Pursuant to the Alameda Municipal Code (AMC), before the Housing Authority is able to begin construction, the Planning Board must review and approve the Design Review

application for the new building. The Design Review application addresses the architectural design of the building and the landscape design for the site.

A Zoning Text Amendment is being requested in order to distribute the required amount of on-site open space in a manner that allows for a more creative architectural design and a better open space plan for the project residents.

## DISCUSSION

Architectural Design: The building is designed as a four-story building that steps down to three stories at the street elevations to provide articulation and a transition in scale between the new building and the surrounding buildings in the neighborhood. The architectural design is influenced by the “craftsman style” and includes a variation of building materials and roof forms to reflect architectural designs and materials that are prevalent in the surrounding neighborhood.

The roof design utilizes a combination of hipped, shed and parapet roof forms that relate to surrounding residential and commercial structures. Deep roof eaves with rafter tails provide a common architectural feature found on many of the older homes near the property.

The project also features a mix of Juliet and full balconies, which front both the interior courtyard and the exterior street frontages. The Eagle Avenue elevation contains porch stoops along all the ground floor units as an interface with the public street.

Exterior finishes of the building include a variety of environmentally friendly building materials in a neutral color palette accented with green. The exterior siding material includes a combination of horizontal siding and board and batten wood which reflect the mixture of horizontal and vertical wood siding in the surrounding neighborhood. The windows feature both single-hung and fixed windows with wood window trim matching those in the surrounding neighborhood.

On-site Open Space and Recreational Amenities: The site plan includes a 104,000-square-foot four-story building that wraps around a central outdoor courtyard for use by the project residents. The building provides a 20-foot landscaped setback from both Eagle Avenue and Buena Vista Avenue. The parking lots are located within the site parallel to the length of the building to minimize visibility from the street. Access to the parking areas is provided from two driveways located along Buena Vista Avenue. An additional Emergency Vehicle Access driveway is located on Eagle Avenue.

The community room and outdoor courtyard will provide a focal point and gathering area for the project. The open space design includes outdoor seating and innovative play areas for children that promote imagination and creative play. Landscape amenities include lounge furniture, a fire pit, outdoor workspace, benches, play area with synthetic lawn, dining tables, barbecue pit, and a covered pergola. Additionally, the community room will provide a multi-purpose room to host social gatherings, a social services office to serve

the tenants, and a bicycle storage room to provide secure parking for a minimum of 66 bikes. In addition, the project provides 18 bike rack spaces (short-term bike parking), and on-site laundry facilities for the residents.

The proposed landscape design reflects Bay-Friendly landscaping principles for low water use, drought resistant, durable, low maintenance native plantings. The plant materials will provide privacy, seasonal interest, texture and shade for the residents. Shade trees and shrubs serve to integrate the new building into the existing neighborhood and screen the parking areas from the neighboring properties. All existing mature street trees will remain and be protected during construction to ensure cohesiveness with the surrounding neighborhood.

Zoning Text Amendment: The AMC establishes a total amount of “useable open space” required for a project of this size in this zoning district. In this case, the project must provide a minimum of 20,000 square feet of “useable open space”. (R-3 requires 500 square feet per unit and R-5 requires 200 feet per unit.) At build-out, the project will include six existing units in the R-3 zone and 85 units in the R-5 zone (78 of the 85 units will be new units and seven are existing units to be preserved), for a total of 91 new and preserved units. The project is designed to provide 21,218 square feet of useable open space, which exceeds the 20,000 minimum established by the Zoning Code. The 21,218 square feet is comprised of 2,901 square feet of “private open space”, in the form of approximately 46 private balconies of about 63 square feet each and 18,317 square feet of “common open space” described above.

AMC Section 30-5.12 requires that every unit must have “private open space” that meets certain size specifications. These provisions essentially require that every unit in each building have a private balcony and that ground floor units have fenced-in patios. To comply with the private open space provisions, this project would need to substantially reduce the amount of “common” open space that it has provided by fencing off patios for every ground floor unit and adding significantly more porches to the exterior of the building.

Staff agrees with the applicant that to comply with these provisions would be detrimental to both the quality of the useable open space provided for the benefit of the residents and detrimental to the quality of the architectural design of the building.

Furthermore, the Housing Authority argues that the increased cost of providing more balconies would require that the Authority reduce costs elsewhere in the design of the project. With the current design, the Housing Authority is able to achieve a good architectural design for the building and achieve an open space plan that better serves the needs of the residents.

For these reasons, staff is recommending that the Planning Board approve the proposed design and recommend that the City Council amend AMC Section 30-5.12 Open Space Requirements to allow this type of design to be constructed in Alameda. Staff is

recommending that AMC Section 30-5.12 be amended to include the following new subsection:

c. Exemption to Allow Redistribution of Private and Common Open Space. In exception to the common and private open space provisions of this section, Design Review applications may be approved with more or less private or common open space provided the following findings can be made: 1) the design meets the amount of total useable open space required, and 2) the combination of private open space and common open space provides a better open space plan for the residents of the site and/or a better architectural design for the building.

The recommended text amendment maintains the existing long-standing “useable open space” requirement for residential projects in Alameda, but allows the City to modify the distribution of that space between “private” and “common” open space to best suit the needs of the specific project, site, building design, and/or resident population. It should also be noted that all Design Review application decisions are appealable, so if there is disagreement in the future on how open space is distributed on a project, a final determination could be decided by the City Council on appeal.

## CONCLUSION

Approval of this Design Review application and Zoning Text Amendment supports the City of Alameda General Plan policies to advocate for, streamline, and expedite the development of housing for low-income individuals and families. Further, staff is able to find that the project design:

- 1) Is consistent with the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and the City of Alameda Design Review Manual;
- 2) Is compatible with adjacent or neighboring buildings;
- 3) Promotes harmonious transitions in scale and character in areas between adjacent land uses; and
- 4) Represents an appropriate balance of good project design and cost efficiency for affordable housing development.

Based on these findings, staff is recommending the Planning Board approve the Design Review and recommend the proposed zoning text amendment to the City Council.

## PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENTS

Property owners and residents within 300 feet of the project’s boundaries were notified of the public hearing and given the opportunity to review and comment on the proposal. As of the writing of this report, no comments were received by staff.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Pursuant to the Public Resource Code 21159.23 exemption for low-income housing, the proposed housing project is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), because the project is 100 percent affordable to low-income households, and the project is consistent with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Moreover, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15332 – Infill Development Projects. In addition, on a separate, independent basis, the proposed zoning text amendment is exempt under Section 15305, Minor Alterations to Land Use Limitations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Hold a public hearing and adopt a draft Resolution recommending that the City Council approve the AMC amendment described above and approving Design Review Application PLN18-0079 (Exhibit 4).

Respectfully submitted:

Henry Dong  
Project Planner

Exhibits:

1. Development Plan Resolution PB-17-14
2. Project Plans
3. Design Intent Statement
4. Draft Resolution